

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

VETERANS RECORDS AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The National Archives and Records Administration recently became aware of erroneous publicity concerning military records that has been circulated to veterans' groups over the Internet. The rumor states that the National Archives will be scanning its military record holdings, and that the paper files will be destroyed unless veterans request that the originals be sent to them. This rumor is false. The National Personnel Records Center does not intend to destroy its paper record holdings. The purpose of any scanning that may be done in the future will be to reduce the need for handling fragile records during the reference process. It is the responsibility of the National Personnel Records Center to preserve and protect Official Military Personnel Files, as they are permanently valuable records documenting the essential evidence of military service for the veterans of our nation.

FACTS ABOUT THE 1973 ST LOUIS FILE AND LOST RECORDS (VA Fact Sheet August 2004)

The National Archives and Records Administration is the official depository for records of military personnel separated from the U. S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The records are housed in three locations: the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Md., and the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Mo.

The NPRC in St. Louis contains records relating to Army officers separated after June 30, 1917, and enlisted Army personnel separated after October 31, 1912; Air Force officers and enlisted personnel separated after September 1947; Naval officers separated after 1902, and naval enlisted personnel separated after 1885; Marine Corps officers separated after 1895, and enlisted personnel separated after 1904; Coast Guard officers separated after 1928, enlisted personnel separated after 1914, and Civilian employees of predecessor agencies (Revenue Cutter Service, Life-Saving Service and Lighthouse Service) of the Coast Guard from 1864-1919.

A fire at the NPRC in St. Louis on July 12, 1973, destroyed about 80 percent of the records for Army personnel

discharged between November 1, 1912, and January 1, 1960. About 75 percent of the records for Air Force personnel with surnames from "Hubbard" through "Z" discharged between September 25, 1947, and January 1, 1964, were also destroyed. It is hard to determine exactly what was lost in the fire, because there were no indices to the blocks of records involved. Millions of records, especially medical records, had been withdrawn from all three groups and loaned to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) before the fire. The fact that one's records are not in NPRC files at a particular time does not mean the records were destroyed in the fire.

If veterans learn that their records may have been lost in the fire, they may send photocopies of any documents they possess -- especially separation documents -- to the NPRC. The address is National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. The NPRC will add those documents to the computerized index and file them permanently.

When veterans don't have copies of their military records and their NPRC files may have been lost in the St. Louis fire, essential information about their military service may be available from a number of other sources. By using alternate sources, NPRC often can reconstruct a veteran's beginning and ending dates of active service, the character of service, rank, time lost on active duty, and periods of hospitalization. NPRC can issue NA Form 13038, "Certification of Military Service," considered the equivalent of a Form DD-214, "Report of Separation From Active Duty," to use in establishing eligibility for veterans benefits.

The key to reconstructing military data is to give the NPRC enough specific information so the staff can properly search the various sources. The following information is normally required: full name used during military service; branch of service; dates of service; Service number and/or Social Security number; place of entry into service; and last unit of assignment.

VA IN FLORIDA VA spent nearly \$4.2 billion in Florida in 2003 to care for more than 1.8 million veterans who live in the state. Last year, 416,434 people received health care.

Between 1996 and 2003, outpatient visits increased from 1,713,973 to 4,128,963. Outpatient visits are projected to increase another 40 percent by 2005. Hospital inpatients treated declined from 45,762 in 1996 to 38,515 in 2003. Hospitalized patients are estimated to decrease another 5 percent by 2005 as workload continues to shift from inpatient to outpatient settings.

261,174 veterans and survivors received disability compensation or pension payments from VA in Florida. VA's St. Petersburg Regional Office serves veterans and their survivors in Florida who are seeking VA financial benefits. In fiscal year 2003, the St. Petersburg office processed 48,648 disability compensation claims. The total includes 12,456 veterans applying for the first time for disability compensation. During fiscal year 2003, the St. Petersburg office acted on 36,192 cases where veterans reopened a claim, usually to seek an increase in their disability rating level for larger payments.

More than 29,551 veterans, reservists or survivors used GI Bill payments for their education, 223,802 owned homes with active VA home loan guarantees and 7,735 were interred in Florida's three national cemeteries.

In 2003, VA homeless programs in Florida have registered more than 2,700 additional homeless veterans for VA services.

VA established a Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program at U.S. naval facilities in the Jacksonville area. VA piloted this program as a joint effort between the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network, VA's St. Petersburg Regional Office, and the naval facilities in the Jacksonville area, with significant assistance from the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs and several state veterans service organizations. This initiative evolved into a nationally recognized program that has allowed a seamless transition for more than 10,000 active duty personnel.

Representatives from the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network in Florida and the 81st Regional Support Command of the U.S. Army Reserves have negotiated an agreement for VA to provide physicals, immunizations and dental screenings for Army reservists. Starting in 1999, Army reserve units have contacted VA medical centers in Florida to schedule appointments for these physicals. This agreement provides a revenue stream to VA medical centers, while providing a much needed service to the Army Reserves.

IMPORTANT DATES IN OCTOBER

October 1 payments for September due

October 7 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2004 payments

October 11 Federal holiday - Columbus Day

October 21 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2004 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications
1-877-823-2378

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries
10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility)
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120
1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit -
Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)
<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>

Property Management **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs:
www.floridavets.org/

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**

